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UNHCR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The last two years have seen significant and rapid changes in the nature, scale and complexity of UNHCR's activities. These developments have placed new demands upon the Central Evaluation Section, and established a need to strengthen the Office's ability to undertake systematic and professional reviews of key policy, management and operational issues.
2. Reviewing this need in the latter part of 1992, the Evaluation Committee concluded that an integrated package of measures was needed to develop UNHCR's evaluation capacity. The measures adopted are designed to build on the existing strengths of the Central Evaluation Section, and to draw more systematically on the evaluation expertise that exists outside of the Office.
3. The evaluation strategy introduced at the beginning of 1993 consists of four principal elements: (1) contracting a greater amount of work to professional evaluation consultants; (2) developing working relationships with research and policy institutes with proven expertise in refugee and humanitarian issues; (3) identifying and training UNHCR staff members with demonstrated aptitude in the evaluation function, and retaining their services within the Central Evaluation Section as semi-specialist staff; and (4) establishing arrangements for the secondment of experienced staff from governmental evaluation agencies. Substantial progress has already been made in implementing the first two of these measures, while the third and fourth approaches are the subject of ongoing discussions with relevant personnel

within and outside of the Office. Increased efforts have also been in the last year to ensure that evaluation conclusions and recommendations are effectively disseminated within UNHCR and incorporated into planning, training, and programme design.

4. The reorganization of the Controller's Division in April 1993 has resulted in a minor change in the composition of the Evaluation Committee. The Director of Programmes and Operational Support has joined the Committee, which also comprises the Deputy High Commissioner, the Controller, and the Director of International Protection. The Committee continues to be responsible for establishing an evaluation work programme, reviewing the recommendations made by internal and external evaluations of UNHCR activities, and ensuring that appropriate follow-up action is taken.

II. 1992-1993 WORK PROGRAMME

5. The introduction of a new evaluation strategy has enabled UNHCR to undertake a greater number and broader range of reviews than in the previous reporting period.

6. Since October 1992, UNHCR has initiated a number of studies relating to durable solutions. These include reviews of the repatriation and reintegration programmes for Cambodian and Nicaraguan refugees and a study of UNHCR's role in the formulation and implementation of "returnee aid and development" programmes. UNHCR has also undertaken a study of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) process, which examines the relevance of recent experience in Central America to the promotion of durable solutions in other parts of the world.

7. Complex humanitarian emergencies form another important evaluation theme. A review of UNHCR operations in former Yugoslavia was initiated in the middle of 1993 to review the evolution of the operation, identify the principal lessons learned from the Office's involvement, and examine the broader impact of the emergency on UNHCR activities.

8. Evaluations undertaken in 1991-1992 on UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capacity have been supplemented in 1993 by a review of the standby staffing arrangement established between UNHCR and two Nordic voluntary agencies. An examination of UNHCR's "cross-mandate" programme in Ethiopia and the relevance of this approach to other emergency situations will also be undertaken in 1993.

9. Reviews relating to several other important policy issues have been initiated during the past twelve months, including an evaluation of the impact of UNHCR's Policy on Refugee Women. The Central Evaluation Section has also undertaken an examination of UNHCR's role in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, and a review of UNHCR policy and practice with regard to refugee enumeration and statistics.

A. Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in Nicaragua

10. UNHCR's reintegration and rehabilitation programme for returnees in Nicaragua - the Quick Impact Project (QIP) initiative - has generated widespread interest and has been heralded as a prototype which could be applied or adapted to other countries where major repatriation movements are anticipated. The Central Evaluation Section completed a review which assessed the impact of QIPs and identified key lessons learned in their planning and implementation.

11. The review concluded that QIPs provide a coherent and effective approach to returnee reintegration, and that such initiatives should be considered as an integral component of future repatriation operations. At the same time, the review indicated that UNHCR may find it more difficult to establish similar programmes in countries where returnee numbers are larger and working conditions more difficult.

12. The evaluation endorsed the very clear set of programme principles, project criteria and working methods upon which the Nicaraguan programme was based. The review suggested that in future programmes of this type greater attention could be given to issues such as the timing and targeting of QIPs; the organizational arrangements established for the formulation, implementation and administration of reintegration activities; and the incorporation of QIPs into broader and longer-term development efforts.

13. The Nicaraguan review pointed out that particular benefits could be gained from greater cooperation between UNHCR and UNDP in the establishment of reintegration programmes, as the two organizations possess different but complementary capabilities. In addition, the evaluation stressed that the sustainability and impact of QIPs could be enhanced by ensuring that governmental institutions are more actively involved in the identification, approval and execution of projects.

14. The Central Evaluation Section's report on Nicaragua has been distributed to all UNHCR offices engaged in the planning and implementation of repatriation programmes. The review has been used in the preparation of workshops and training courses on repatriation programmes, and in drafting a set of guidelines on QIPs for UNHCR offices in the field.

B. The Cambodian repatriation operation

15. In 1992-1993, some 360,000 Cambodians returned from Thailand to their country of origin with UNHCR assistance, in one of the largest office repatriation movements ever undertaken by the Office. The Central Evaluation Section and the Regional Bureau for Asia completed a review of the Cambodia operation to assess its effectiveness and identify any lessons which could be used in the planning and implementation of other repatriation programmes.

16. The review, which is presently being finalized, concluded that the Cambodian repatriation was in many senses an exemplary operation. The review cited both the advantageous circumstances in which the repatriation took place, and the effectiveness of UNHCR management as having been of crucial importance to the operation's success.

17. In particular, the operation benefited from an experienced team of UNHCR staff members; effective leadership; a flexible and field-oriented approach to decision-making; a commitment to inter-agency cooperation; and a dynamic approach to external relations. The evaluation recommended that these managerial principles be applied to all future repatriation operations.

18. In order to avoid some of the difficulties which arose during the Cambodia repatriation, the review suggested that UNHCR's planning assumptions could be more rigorously scrutinized. Greater attention should also be given to the harmonization of UNHCR activities in countries of origin and asylum, and to the administrative capacity of offices which are engaged in major operations of this type.

19. The lessons identified in the Cambodia review will be incorporated into UNHCR's training and planning activities. The findings will also be discussed with UNDP, which has invited UNHCR to participate in a more detailed review of the Cambodian reintegration programme.

C. Returnee aid and development

20. The Central Evaluation Section's reviews of UNHCR repatriation and reintegration programmes in Nicaragua and Cambodia form part of a broader effort to clarify the Office's role in assisting returnee populations in their country of origin.

21. In the context of this initiative, which is being undertaken in cooperation with UNHCR's recently-appointed Senior Coordinator for Reintegration Assistance, the Central Evaluation Section has initiated a study of UNHCR's role in the promotion, formulation and implementation of returnee aid and development programmes. A preliminary examination of this issue was presented to the forty-third session of the Executive Committee, in a document entitled "Bridging the gap between returnee aid and development: a challenge to the international community" (EC/SC.2/56).

22. The purpose of this study is to examine the origins and development of the returnee aid and development concept, identify the circumstances under which this approach is appropriate and feasible, and make recommendations concerning the nature, extent and duration of UNHCR participation in such efforts. In addition, the review examines the organizational and operational implications of UNHCR involvement in returnee aid and development initiatives.

D. The CIREFCA process

23. In Central America, efforts to promote the reintegration of refugees and other groups of displaced persons have been pursued within the context of a regional initiative known as CIREFCA, jointly coordinated by UNHCR and UNDP. UNHCR's Central Evaluation Section has contracted the Washington-based Refugee Policy Group to undertake a review of the CIREFCA process.

24. This study will examine the structure and evolution of the CIREFCA model; assess the relevance of that model to the pursuit of durable solutions in other regions of the world; analyze the effectiveness of the relationship established between UNHCR and UNDP; and assess the political, social and economic impact of CIREFCA at the project level.

25. Fieldwork for this review has been completed and the report will be finalized after further consultations with UNDP. At that stage UNHCR and UNDP will also consider how the report might be most appropriately followed up.

E. UNHCR operations in former Yugoslavia

26. In order to identify lessons learned from UNHCR's operations in former Yugoslavia, the High Commissioner requested the Central Evaluation Section to carry out a review of selected activities and issues.

27. The in-depth evaluation, which is still in progress, was preceded in mid-year by a survey of operational activities. The survey focused on a number of issues, including: the coordination of UNHCR activities with non-traditional partners such as military forces; external relations activities and UNHCR's use of the media; the effectiveness of preventive protection; and the relationship between programme and protection objectives and the logistics operation. In addition, the survey analyzed issues arising from UNHCR's presence in a war zone, examined the precedents set by the operation and analyzed its implications for UNHCR activities elsewhere.

28. The results of the initial survey were used to facilitate a self-evaluation of the operation by key participants, and to prepare the final terms of reference for the in-depth evaluation.

F. Emergency staffing arrangements

29. In October 1991 the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils concluded a two-year standby staffing arrangement with UNHCR, intended to improve UNHCR's capacity to assist and protect refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR in emergency situations.

30. UNHCR and the two refugee councils are co-sponsoring an independent evaluation of the standby staffing arrangement. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which the arrangement has met its stated

objectives; identify the principal lessons learned from emergency operations in which secondees have been deployed; and make recommendations designed to enhance the effectiveness of any future standby staffing arrangement. The three organizations have established an Evaluation Steering Committee, which will be responsible for reviewing the report and ensuring that appropriate follow-up action is taken.

G. UNHCR policy on refugee women

31. Since 1985, when the Executive Committee adopted a conclusion on Refugee Women and Refugee Protection, (Conclusion No. 39(XXXVI)) UNHCR has developed a comprehensive policy on refugee women. The Central Evaluation Section is currently reviewing the adequacy, implementation and impact of that policy.

32. A principal purpose of the review is to examine the concept of "mainstreaming" gender issues and to assess the operational implications of this approach. The review also focuses on the effectiveness of specific actions which have been taken to disseminate and implement UNHCR's policy on refugee women, such as "people-oriented planning" training activities, the placement of officers with a specific responsibility for women's issues in key field locations, and the introduction of Guidelines for the Protection of Refugee Women (EC/SCP/67).

33. On completion of the report, a Steering Committee will be established, comprised of representatives from appropriate Bureaux and Divisions within UNHCR, to oversee the follow-up to the review.

H. Protecting and assisting internally displaced persons

34. On a number of recent occasions, UNHCR has been requested to extend its activities to include people who have been displaced within their own country. The opportunities for UNHCR to become involved with this group appear likely to grow in the future.

35. The Central Evaluation Section is presently engaged in a study which examines the implications of these trends for the work of UNHCR and provides specific proposals for future organizational policy and practice in providing internally displaced persons with protection, assistance and durable solutions. The evaluation examines the actual and potential involvement of other humanitarian agencies with the internally displaced, and recommends legal and organizational initiatives which would enhance the security and welfare of this group.

36. Once the report's conclusions and recommendations have been reviewed by relevant Bureaux and Divisions within UNHCR, additional work may be carried out on this issue, examining the Office's role with regard to internally displaced persons in specific geographical locations.

I. Refugee enumeration and statistics

37. In recent years, UNHCR has employed a variety of systems and techniques to collect and collate statistical data relating to refugees. Much of the information gathered by or provided to the Office, however, has proved to be of limited value.

38. In order to learn lessons from past experience and to provide specific recommendations for the future, the Central Evaluation Section completed a two-part review of UNHCR policy and practice with regard to refugee enumeration and statistics.

39. The first part of the review, which focused on mass determination programmes, concluded that UNHCR's capacity to collect accurate data on large refugee populations is limited by a variety of logistical, political and methodological constraints. While these constraints cannot be eliminated, greater efforts could be made to overcome them by introducing new approaches to data collection and by ensuring that optimal enumeration conditions are established at the outset of all new operations.

40. The second part of the evaluation examined the issue of asylum statistics in Western Europe. The review stated that while efforts have been made to harmonize asylum policies within the region, the same attention has not been given to the issue of statistical data. While each country provides data to UNHCR regularly, each does so at different intervals, with varying degrees of detail, and in constantly changing formats.

41. In these circumstances, the review concluded, the scope for improvement is limited. While UNHCR should take steps to clarify its statistical needs and establish effective recording systems for the data it receives, real progress will depend on the willingness of European Governments to provide UNHCR with statistics which are accurate, consistent and comparable.

42. The Central Evaluation Section has invited all UNHCR offices to comment on the review. Their comments, along with the conclusions and recommendations presented in the report, are being taken into account in the preparation of a set of practical guidelines on refugee registration and enumeration. Responsibility for this task is being shared by UNHCR's newly-appointed Statistician, and a member of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section.

III. EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

43. Two major external evaluations of UNHCR activities were completed during the reporting period.

44. The first, undertaken by the United Nations Central Evaluation Unit at the request of the Economic and Social Council's Committee on Programme and Coordination (CPC), examined a broad range of issues, including UNHCR's role

in providing refugees and other displaced people with protection, assistance and durable solutions; UNHCR's training and promotional activities; and finance, management and human-resource questions. The CPC discussed and endorsed the evaluation report during its May 1993 meeting, and decided that the review should be transmitted to UNHCR's Executive Committee for consideration and action.

45. The second external evaluation, carried out on behalf of the International Humanitarian Assistance Division of the Canadian International Development Agency, focused more specifically on three questions: organizational resources, organizational strategy, and organizational performance. UNHCR has carried out an extensive examination of the evaluation report, and has taken its conclusions and recommendations into account during recent reviews of the Office's human resources and programme management activities.